

MEMORANDUM

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DATE: 12/18/68

TO: Dan Ellsberg  
FROM: Charles Wolf, Jr.

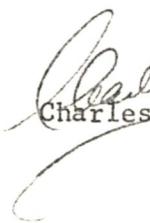
MEMO NO.: M-8808

SUBJECT: AN APPROACH TO THE VIETNAM PROBLEM

COPIES TO: C. Cooper, F. Ikle<sup>1</sup>, H. Rowen, S. Canby, B. Jenkins,  
G. Pauker, B. West

I am attaching some notes on one approach that we might take to this matter. As I have mentioned before and am prepared to elaborate on further, it seems to me to be an approach that is likely to make a great deal of sense to the new Administration. I won't go into the reasons for this contention in detail here, except to say that it would seem evident that one of the principal considerations that will influence the new Administration's assessment of Vietnam will be the prospect of the next Presidential election four years down the road. It is not too early for the new President to begin seriously to consider what posture he wants to be in with respect to Vietnam by the end of 1971, and how to get there from here. Approaching the problem as a resource constrained maximization problem provides, I think, a way of answering this need. I would also argue that it probably provides a good way, and maybe the only way, to impel the United States bureaucracy -- and particularly the military services -- to think and to move in a direction that will selectively reduce United States involvement, and to do so in a way that offers both a challenge and a bearable burden to motivate GVN and RVNAF performance.

CW:mf  
Attachment

  
Charles Wolf, Jr.

VIETNAM AS A CONSTRAINED MAXIMIZATION PROBLEM

One way of looking at Vietnam is to say that by the latter part of 1971 the United States intends to reduce its expenditures expressed in terms of three different budgets: (a) total military forces in Vietnam [e.g., ≤ two divisions]; (b) annual U.S. casualties [e.g., ≤ 1,000]; and (c) annual dollar expenditures [e.g., \$3 billion]. Two things might be noted about these constraints; one is that satisfying one is not necessarily the same as satisfying any other (for example, the troop constraint might be satisfied, but the casualty constraint might be exceeded), whereas the problem that should be posed is how to satisfy all three constraints; the constraints that are embodied in (a) and (c) would come fairly close to the steady state of involvement we have maintained over the past decade in Korea.

Subject to these constraints, the objective I would suggest is to maximize the chance of survival of a non-Communist South Vietnam. I will take it as self evident that the chance to be maximized would in any event be considerably less than unity and that ex ante there would be some wide differences in prior probability estimates by some relatively well-qualified people. (For example, from discussions I have had on this matter over the last month or two, I infer that the following would put the prior at considerably more than .5: Lansdale, Hudson, Vu Van Thai and, incidentally, me. On the other hand, there are others who would put the prior estimate far below that: Ellsberg, West, and Kellen.)

Given this formulation of the problem, how should we proceed and where would we look for the moves that would provide the answer to it? I suggest that the ingredients include, though they're probably not confined to, the following:

1. A plan for the transfer of specific military and area security roles and missions from U.S. to RVNAF forces. The principle governing the transfer first should be to those RVNAF units that are most able to assume the expanded burden, and to proceed with the transfer to the second best, next best, and so on. (It is my impression that from work

already done at Rand by Jenkins, Canby and West there are a number of results that will be relevant for such a transfer plan. Changing tactics should be viewed as a way of accomplishing the transfer, rather than a substitute for it. Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that one view at Rand seems to suggest that the transfer of combat roles from U.S. to RVNAF responsibility should take place first, with the United States retaining a logistics backup in this phase, while other Rand work seems to suggest that the logistics should be transferred or thinned out first and then combat responsibilities transferred thereafter. There may very well be opportunities for combining these apparently conflicting positions.)

2. A similar plan for the transfer of non-military roles and missions that have been exercised by U.S. agencies should be drawn up in accordance with the same principle: the best first, the second best next, etc. What I have in mind here are such functions as port management, communications, etc. I would think Chuck Cooper's knowledge about U.S. AID operations would be of help for this part of the plan.

3. Implementation of this strategy would call for formal and detailed discussions and negotiations with the GVN. The United States stance would be one of close and cooperative relations with an intimate ally toward whom, for reasons of force majeure, we are obliged to reduce the over-expanded scope of our support. Our declared and actual aim should be to do so in the most responsible way possible, but to fulfill the intention in any event. Thus, our primary negotiations should be viewed as with the GVN, while the negotiations with Hanoi in Paris should be viewed as secondary. To the extent that the U.S. strategy can be coordinated with NVA withdrawals, cease fire, and improved border control technology (e.g., Milt Weiner's current work), this is desirable. But basically such accomplishments should be regarded as windfalls, rather than as the core of the problem.

4. On matters concerning the GVN's administrative efficiency and political breadth and effectiveness, I think Guy Pauker's recent work would be quite relevant. However, we should severely confine the

extent to which we pressure and admonish the GVN lest the very process itself nullify our prime aim of accomplishing a substantial reduction in a responsible way.

The basic problem that this approach seems to me to leave open is that of deterring or of dealing with a large-scale NVA invasion during or following the three-year period from now to 1971. Thai thinks, as you know, that U.S. air power can provide a sufficient deterrent to avert this contingency, though we have not talked about targeting, and specifically whether this would include resumed attacks in the North and on what. Clearly, more thought needs to be given to this contingency in the course of working on the constrained maximization strategy.